

# **Guidelines for Designation of Natural Beauty Roads**

(As provided by Part 357, Natural Beauty Roads, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994  
PA451, as amended)

These guidelines have been prepared jointly by the Department of Natural Resources and the County Road Association in consultation with other persons knowledgeable in the identification of natural and aesthetic values.

## **Guidelines**

### **Goals**

The goals of the Natural Beauty Roads program are to identify and preserve in a natural, essentially undisturbed condition, certain county-local roads having unusual or outstanding natural beauty by virtue of native vegetation or other natural features within or associated with the right-of-way, for the use and enjoyment of local residents and the public in general.

### **Objectives**

1. To officially recognize and designate roads in the county-local system which meet the natural beauty criteria.
2. To keep these roadsides as they presently exist insofar as possible.
3. To maintain and administer these roads so that they will continue to meet the criteria and at the same time provide safe public travel.
4. To mark such roads for the information of the public.

### **Criteria for Designation**

1. Character of Road – To qualify as a natural beauty road, a road must have outstanding natural features along its borders, including native trees and other native vegetation such as shrubs, wildflowers, grasses, and ferns, and open areas with scenic or natural vistas, which, singly or in combination, set this road apart from other roads as being something unique and distinct.
2. Length – Normally a minimum of one-half mile will be considered for designation as a natural beauty road with exceptions below this length depending upon unusual features. Stretches will be continuous except where broken by a non-qualifying portion. Non-qualifying portions should normally not exceed one-half mile in length.
3. Roadside Development – Qualifying roads should preferably have no development along them, but such development as exists at the time the road is designated should be compatible with the surroundings, and should not detract from the natural unspoiled character and visual impact of the road area.
4. Road Bed – Natural beauty roads may be dirt, gravel, or hard surface.
5. Function of the Road – Normally, the existing road should function as a local access road, i.e., one which serves the adjacent property owners, and/or as a road serving those wishing to travel for the purpose of enjoying its natural beauty features. Any road serving as a collector or a higher functional classification as defined by Federal standards would generally preclude designation as a Natural Beauty Road
6. Speed – Natural beauty roads are intended to be low speed roads for purposes of enjoyment. It is recommended that hard surface roads be posted for a speed of not more than 35 MPH, gravel and dirt roads, 25 MPH.

## **Accepted Maintenance Practices**

In general, natural beauty roads should receive the same level of maintenance performed on the road prior to designation, as long as the character of use and development of the road does not change to the extent that a higher degree of maintenance is necessary.

1. Mowing – Mowing should be continued where done previously, but should be limited to one swath (maximum of five feet) on either side as follows:
  - a. On one-lane trail or dirt roads, mowing should be immediately adjacent to the tracks.
  - b. On two-way gravel roads, mowing should be immediately adjacent to the edge of the graded surface.
  - c. On paved roads, mowing should be immediately adjacent to the edge of the pavement.
2. Grading – Grading will be kept as narrow as possible. This should normally be kept within a total width of 10 to 15 feet for trail roads. On other roads, grading should continue as normally provided and be kept to a minimum to avoid disturbance of vegetation. It should be pulled back to avoid trees or unusual sites which have been designated.
3. Herbicides – Under no circumstances will herbicides be used to control or eliminate roadside vegetation.
4. Dust Laying – Where dust laying has been the practice or becomes a necessity, a minimum level of dust treatment may be used.
5. Cross Drainage – Cross drainage must be handled where necessary to prevent damage to the road and possible washouts and other problems which may be detrimental to proper safety.
6. Signing – Natural beauty roads will be identified at entrance points by a specifically designated standard sign to be of a design prepared by the Department of Transportation, and placed by the County Road Commission. The length of the designated road will be indicated on the sign.
7. Tree and Shrub Trimming and Tree Removal – Where necessary for safety or protection of the traveling public and vehicles, tree branches and shrubs may be trimmed or whole trees removed. This should be done judiciously and with proper tools so as not to leave unsightly scars.
8. Road Surfacing – The existing road surface at the time of designation should normally be continued. Necessary changes in surface to improve safety, drainage, reduce maintenance problems, etc., may be cause for undesignating roads if such changes disturb the natural beauty characteristics for which the road was designated.

## **Resources**

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- Voss, E.G. 1985. Michigan Flora. Part II, Dicots (Saururaceae – Cornaceae). Cranbrook Inst. of Science Bull. 59. Bloomfield Hills, MI. Cranbrook Institute of Science. 724 pp.
- Voss, E.G. 1996. Michigan Flora. Part III, Dicots (Pyrolaceae - Compositae). Cranbrook Inst. of Science Bull. 61. Bloomfield Hills, MI. Cranbrook Institute of Science. 622 pp.

## **Related Legislation**

Part 305, Natural Rivers, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA451, as amended.

Part 351, Wilderness and Natural Areas, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA451, as amended.

Part 357, Natural Beauty Roads, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA451, as amended.

Part 365, Endangered Species Protection, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA451, as amended.

Part 529, Christmas Trees, Boughs, Plants, and Other Trees, of the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, 1994 PA451, as amended.

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